

# Rock n Roll on the Hawaii Superferry

Story and Photos by **Melvin Ah Ching**

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Let me tell you about the *Hawaii Superferry*.

You know the big blue and white ship that spent most of the last four months sitting at Honolulu Harbor's Pier 19 all tied up with nowhere to go.



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Just about everyone in Hawaii is familiar with the issues that left the ferry tied up: environmental study requirements and waiver; court orders halting the operation; the special legislative session; the new law that was passed to help the ferry; the fear about hitting whales, invasive species, increased traffic, drug proliferation, transport of i'wi and sacred stones, net fishing, animals, bad weather and more. You'd think after all this the ferry would never run.

But run it did.

Superferry finally made its return to commercial service voyage from Honolulu to Maui and back on December 13. I was lucky enough to join the media contingent from HawaiiReporter.com on the inaugural trip. The following is a review of that Superferry trip.

## THE VESSEL

*Alakai* is the name of the first Superferry vessel. It is a 349 ft. long, 4 story high catamaran cruiser that displaces more than 800 tons and contains 4 decks, 2 of which can hold up to 282 vehicles, a passenger deck that can accommodate up to 866 travelers and a high tech bridge. The passenger deck is finely appointed with large panoramic windows, 3 food and drink stations, many flatscreen TVs, a video game center, children's playroom, aircraft-style seating, comfy sofas, and executive dining tables. *Alakai* can travel up to 40 mph (35 knots) and has four 10,988 horsepower diesel engines.

## THE SERVICE

Employees at Hawaii Superferry seemed genuinely happy to be back on the job servicing paying customers. The ticket agents, security screeners, shuttle bus drivers, and cabin crew were friendly, courteous, helpful and informative throughout the trip. Some of the cabin crew had time to chat on each 3-hour trip segment.

## THE RIDE

Starting service near the dead of winter, Superferry encountered first-day sea swells that were large enough to have the weather service issue "small craft warnings". The mighty Superferry plowed through the choppy seas in a bumpy and rolling fashion. The wind was blowing at about 10 to 20 mph, and waves of about 10 feet high would occasionally send their salt spray mist over the ship, splashing the side windows of the main

cabin. The fully enclosed passenger cabin protects passengers and crew from the elements. However, several people did get seasick which is expected on such a bumpy trip. This should be less of a problem on days with good weather and calmer seas.

The choppy rolling surf was apparent from the Molokai Channel all the way to Maui shortly before reaching the harbor. Through it all, we never saw nor came close to any whale. The trip back to Honolulu yielded a much smoother ride since Superferry was just "going with the flow" in the direction of the same waves that pounded us on the voyage going over.

Popular activities to pass the time during the 3-hour long voyage included eating, drinking, sleeping, watching TV movies and programs, playing video games, doing work or engaging in conversation with other travelers and the crew. For the photo bugs like me, a Superferry trip presents a fantastic opportunity to catch views of the islands and ocean from a different perspective.

## THE VIEWS

Needless to say that despite the less than ideal weather, the views of the islands and ocean were spectacular. Leaving and entering port on both islands present shutterbugs with views they normally don't get while flying or being landlocked. Coastal views of Maui and Molokai were breathtaking. Even the protesters and increased security on Maui provided photographers with something to see and shoot.

## THE PROTESTERS

For the most part, the protesters on Maui were about as loud and boisterous as the ones on Kauai. At least they respected the security zone, thanks to highly visible, beefed up protection from the U.S. Coast Guard, Maui Police Department and the State Dept. of Land & Natural Resources. There were only a few protesters in the water who waved signs that could not be clearly seen from the vessel. Most of the protesters probably made their impact by slowing traffic down on the streets and highway just outside the harbor.

Processing and loading of vehicles and passengers was orderly and efficient. No one blocked the way. Cars, trucks, vans and SUVs went up and down the ferry ramp with no problem. Getting out of the harbor was not much of a problem even though protesters lined the sides of the road and created artificial traffic jams with their own cars.

## CONCLUSION

Hawaii Superferry is a great alternative to inter-island flying and well worth the time and money, especially if you are a business and need to transport many things with your vehicle. I can see the Hawaii Superferry becoming successful if the business community, nonprofit organizations and casual travelers embrace it as much as they supported for it during the tumultuous days of the recent special legislative session. I can't wait to sail again in the future, especially when Superferry starts going to the Big Island of Hawaii.

